

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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R 131530Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY BLANTYRE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6333

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BLANTYRE 1015

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MI

SUBJ: LAW RESTRICTING JOURNALISTS

REF: A. BLANTYRE 994; B. BLANTYRE 804

1. IN CONCLUDING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT JULY 13, MINISTER OF EDUCATION MSONTHI READ PREPARED STATEMENT DURING DEBATE ON LAW CONCERNED WITH TRANSMITTAL BY JOURNALISTS OF "FALSE" INFORMATION. STATEMENT WARNED FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS AGAINST ASSOCIATION WITH JOURNALISTS INVOLVED IN DISSEMINATION OF "FALSE" INFORMATION. MSONTHI STATED EMBASSIES ENGAGING IN THIS PRACTICE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF PERSONNEL WERE DECLARED PERSONA NON GRATA.

2. CONCLUDING DEBATE PRESIDENT BANDA EXPANDED ON MSONTHI'S STATEMENT. IN AGITATED FASHION HE DECLARED DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS MUST BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO ENCOURAGE "SUBVERSION" BY RELATIONS WITH JOURNALISTS. THEY SHOULD NOT ENCOURAGE JOURNALISTS TO COME TO THEM AND TELL "LIES." PRESIDENT LISTED BY NAME MOST PERSONS MENTIONED REFTEL B. HE DESCRIBED THESE JOURNALISTS AS KNOWN LIARS WHO COULD NOT HOLD A JOB. PRESIDENT BERATED
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FOREIGN EMBASSIES FOR NOT TRYING TO FIND OUT CHARACTER OF

THESE CONTACTS. HE ASSERTED EMBASSIES HAD DUTY TO TRY TO FIND TRUTH; THEY SHOULD NOT JUST SWALLOW WHAT THEY WERE TOLD. HE ASKED WHY EMBASSIES COULD NOT DO THEIR OWN RESEARCH. ALL MALAWIANS ACQUAINTED WITH THEM KNEW PEOPLE IN QUESTION WERE "NO GOOD." FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WHO CAME TO MALAWI FOR A SHORT TIME MIGHT NOT BE EXPECTED TO MAKE SAME INVESTIGATIONS.

3. COMMENT: PAO AND OTHER EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH MOST OF JOURNALISTS MENTIONED BY PRESIDENT. IN COURSE OF HIS REGULAR ACTIVITIES PAO HAS COME TO KNOW SEVERAL QUITE WELL. ALL WERE CONSIDERED REPUTABLE MEMBERS OF THEIR PROFESSION AND WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT CONFIRMATION OF CHARGES BY GOM. IMMEDIATELY AFTER PARLIAMENTARY SESSION I ASKED GEORGE JAFFU, SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT AND CABINET, IF PRESIDENT'S REMARKS PORTENDED DIFFICULTIES. JAFFU REPLIED THAT AS FAR AS HE AWARE AMERICAN EMBASSY NOT INVOLVED. HE THOUGHT PRESIDENT HAD IN MIND FRENCH EMBASSY AND ITS RELATIONS WITH NEW PRESS AGENCY. AS REPORTED REFTEL, B, PRESS ATTACHE OF FRENCH EMBASSY WAS SUDDENLY ASKED TO LEAVE MALAWI IN MAY. REGARDLESS OF WHICH EMBASSY PRESIDENT AND MOSNTHI MEANT, RECENT ACCUSATIONS WILL MAKE MORE DIFFICULT OUR RELATIONS WITH MEDIA AND WILL TEND IN GENERAL TO DISCOURAGE MALAWI CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN MISSIONS.
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